

HALLAIG

"Time, the deer, is in the wood of Hallaig"

*The window is nailed and boarded
through which I saw the West
and my love is at the Burn of Hallaig,
a birch tree, and she has always been*

*between Inver and Milk Hollow,
here and there about Baile-chuiru:
she is a birch, a hazel,
a straight, slender young rowan.*

*In Screapadal of my people
where Norman and Big Hector were,
their daughters and their sons are a wood
going up beside the stream.*

*Proud tonight the pine cocks
crowing on the top of Cnoc an Ra,
straight their backs in the moonlight —
they are not the wood I love.*

*I will wait for the birch wood
until it comes up by the cairn,
until the whole ridge from Beinn na Lice
will be under its shade.*

*If it does not, I will go down to Hallaig,
to the Sabbath of the dead,
where the people are frequenting,
every single generation gone.*

*They are still in Hallaig,
MacLeans and MacLeods,
all who were there in the time of Mac Gille Chaluim
the dead have been seen alive.*

*The men lying on the green
at the end of every house that was,
the girls a wood of birches,
straight their backs, bent their heads.*

*Between the Leac and Fearnas
the road is under mild moss
and the girls in silent bands
go to Clachan as in the beginning,*

*and return from Clachan
from Suisnish and the land of the living;
each one young and light-stepping,
without the heartbreak of the tale.*

*From the Burn of Fearnas to the raised beach
that is clear in the mystery of the hills,
there is only the congregation of the girls
keeping up the endless walk,*

*coming back to Hallaig in the evening,
in the dumb living twilight,
filling the steep slopes,
their laughter a mist in my ears,*

*and their beauty a film on my heart
before the dimness comes on the kyles,
and when the sun goes down behind Dun Cana
a vehement bullet will come from the gun of hove;*

*and will strike the deer that goes dizzily,
sniffing at the grass-grown ruined homes;
his eye will freeze in the wood,
his blood will not be traced while I live.*